Edward H Stocking Rarity Assessment in Law Libraries: A Survey of Criteria, Procedure and Qualifications. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S degree. April, 2019. 26 pages. Advisor: Denise Anthony

Researchers aimed to establish current criteria, procedure and qualifications for rarity assessment in law libraries through a survey of law school library staff. Seventeen librarians from relevant departments responded to the survey. While only about half of respondent institutions conduct rarity assessment, there is a degree of commonality to the criteria used in these assessments. Responses indicate that age and item status at sister institutions are the most common criteria in determining rarity. Survey responses also indicate that while rarity assessment is a task conducted by multiple staff members, little time is actually spent conducting assessments. Moreover, while respondents hold relevant, full-time staff positions and, in some cases, upper and middle management roles, very few have any formal education in rarity assessment.

Headings:

Rare books

Rare book librarianship

RARITY ASSESSMENT IN LAW LIBRARIES: A SURVEY OF CRITERIA, PROCEDURE AND QUALIFICATIONS

by
Edward H Stocking

A Master's paper submitted to the faculty
of the School of Information and Library Science
of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in
Information Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

April 2019

Approved by

____

Denise Anthony

Table of Contents

I. Introduction

Special Collections are a part of many libraries. They are the collections librarians highlight in order to display the prominence of their library's holdings. In the case of special libraries---specifically in academic settings---special collections are an organic result of an institutions' age; a product of donations; and an effort to display an institution's prominence often supplemental to the guidelines of the collection development policy. This can pose an interesting challenge for special librarians, who are responsible for these collections of rare and unique items but often are not trained in bibliography or assessment of rare or historic materials.

Historically, the antiquarian book field is dominated by sellers, and value is determined predominantly by booksellers before auctions or sales. Sellers do little to explain the reasons for prices. Thus, it is difficult to understand what drives value. Simply put, in the business of rare books, information is controlled and rarely distributed. This may be acceptable for rare book dealers and buyers but makes assessment far more difficult for library staff for whom rare manuscript education would be excessive, due to the desperate nature of law librarianship and archival education.

This research focused on determining if there were common rare book assessment practices in special libraries, specifically in the criteria and processes law school librarians use to determine rarity. . The researcher used a survey to gather this information. The survey also aimed to understand who is responsible for rarity assessment by gathering job title information, as well as their formal education on the topic. The analysis of the data the respondents supplied provides an indicator of common practices in the field.

II. Literature review

Guidelines and practices determine assessment standards. The focus of this area of research is to determine basic trends in valuation, because the value of a book is determined by a variety of factors. Reading broadly about polices for transferring books from general to special collections and general collection development serves a similar end and could be a different route to take for deliverables. Understanding how purpose shapes collecting decisions can also impact what librarians factor into rarity assessment. The literature for this subject falls into a few subcategories: guidelines on policies, guidelines on assessment, and bibliography.

Guidelines on policy include information on transfer material and collection development. These have been helpful for understanding the goal of rare collections. The Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) provides a structure for writing "Guidelines on the Selection and Transfer of Materials from General Collections to Special Collections". It defines the transfer policy as the document of most importance. The ACRL document also identifies six transfer criteria: market value; rarity and scarcity; date and place of publication; physical and intrinsic characteristics; bibliographic and research value; and condition (ALA 2007). For some, the special collection policy also focuses on specific collection types or subjects (Arizona State Library Archives and Public Records). Further review in this area is out of scope for this current study, because this research seeks to establish a baseline for transfer, not for the collection.

Library staff can determine the six criteria with varying degrees of ease. Unfortunately, price is the hardest. But libraries have a natural advantage in determining other criteria, including date and place of publication; bibliographic and research value; and rarity and scarcity as these are elements of catalog records and are accessible via OCLC WorldCat.

Guidelines on assessment are paramount for crafting a proper understanding of current views on rarity. The literature discusses rare books in a variety of ways that will be useful for this research. Some attempt to get to brass tacks, some attempt to flush out intangible qualities of value, and some focus setting. In all, each approach is telling when seeking to define rarity. However, finding sources that try to explain rarity in simple terms are hard to come by. Assessment is a profession and a huge industry, so the information is tightly controlled. In some cases, rarity is not something that can be simply decided (Sheehan). There are intangible qualities that change a book's value, or (more likely) the decision to mark a book rare has little to do with its content. Sometimes, a signature or bookplate is enough. In cases such as these, the book has little inherent value. There are two specific studies in the medical library field that are useful for conducting rare book assessment in special libraries (Annan, Gnudi). Both discuss similar criteria as the ACLR guidelines, but also note popularity as a cause for collection. So, overall, what is the relationship between these articles and the research you did? Did they not give you sufficient information so that you needed to ask your survey questions? Bibliography is the study of a book's physical qualities. Understanding the book and being able to discuss its defining features is useful in understanding rarity. Often the bibliographic qualities are important in understanding the conservation needs of a book (Annan). Understanding a material's condition also enables assessors to make assumptions on decisions regarding other holdings, because condition and rarity of item often work in tandem to determine rarity (Sheehan). Finally, bibliography is often a first step in the assessment process, because most assessment begins serendipitously (Korotkova).

Special collections differ from special libraries because of their inherent focus on rare materials. As such, the workers employed in special collections have a familiarity and education set that allows them to manage rare material appropriately (Bowden). Given the focus on rare materials, special collections librarians use their materials differently than special librarians (Bahde). Specifically, in special libraries rare books are used in instruction and well as advocacy, while rare book rooms in special libraries often are only used when requested by patrons. Moreover, Special collections and special libraries do not always collect the same level of rare materials (Latham). Most importantly, special collections spend more time dealing with their rare material, and therefore have a better understanding of what they have accumulated through their collecting. It is this reason that transfer policies are so important, because they are the standard by which special librarians move items between their general and rare collections, a dichotomy not present in a rare books library.

This is the other side of the coin when studying rare book collections in special libraries: It is also important to understand the needs and limits of the general collection. For example, decisions about transferring materials are complex because they could affect access. Special librarians conceive of rarity assessment as a supplementary role (Dystert). It is largely a form of upkeep, brought about by a need to preserve materials (Westney). Ironically, although often viewed as an additional service, rare books often represent a huge proportion of the monetary value of a collection (Potter and Holley).

Librarians in special libraries must also contend with the limits of their software, as MARC cataloging and most ILS are insufficient for properly describing ephemera and rare items (Greenberg).

III. Methods

Recruitment

Because this study focused on rarity assessment in law libraries, the researcher recruited librarians listed in the top 100 law school libraries in America based on a 2010 ranking by The National Jurist. While there are several law school rankings, this ranking put significant weight on collection size and number of full-time professional librarians. An underlying assumption of the researcher was that higher circulation loans would imply a greater need to move an item to a rare collection. After compiling the list of libraries, the researcher assembled their respective library directories. The researcher attempted to find the most pertinent individual based on job title, highlighting archives, rare books and manuscripts, special collections, collection services, and finally circulation services. The researcher contacted the individuals via the emails listed on the directory.

Data Collection

The researcher gathered research via Qualtrics survey, see appendix. The survey consisted of 11 questions in three parts. (See appendix for survey questions) Part One asked four questions related to the criteria for rarity assessment in the participants law library and relevant forms. Part Two included five procedural questions relating to the priority and systems in place at the participants' law library. Part Three included two professional questions regarding the participants title and education background. The researcher sent the email to 80 participants, and received 17 completed surveys, resulting in a response rate of 22.5%. The researcher sent the email twice, on sequential Tuesday mornings.

IV. Results

Data Analysis

Part One:

Only half of survey respondents undertook rarity assessment in their law libraries. Of these, only 3 attached formal documents or workflows. Assuming the likelihood of rarity assessment decreases with collection size and prominence of library, it is difficult to ascertain the sample size. Anonymity was kept out of respect for the privacy of participants, but a further study focused on a more specific set of law libraries, such as the so called “Top 14” law schools could create a more authoritative set of standards, at the expense of sample size.

Of the 17 completed surveys, seven participants indicated their institutions did not conduct rarity assessments. Nine indicated yes, while another completed the survey without selecting an answer for Question 1. Three participants attached forms as requested in Questions 2 and 3. These were: a holdings limit based on year, a rare book collection development policy, and a Qualtrics rarity assessment flowchart. Question 4 was a multipart question that asked respondents to enter values based on five possible rarity metrics. These included age of material (9 answers), global holdings (6 answers), rarity status at other libraries (7 answers), circulation statistics (3 answers), and an option for other factors (10 answers).

Chart 1: Factors in Rarity Assessment

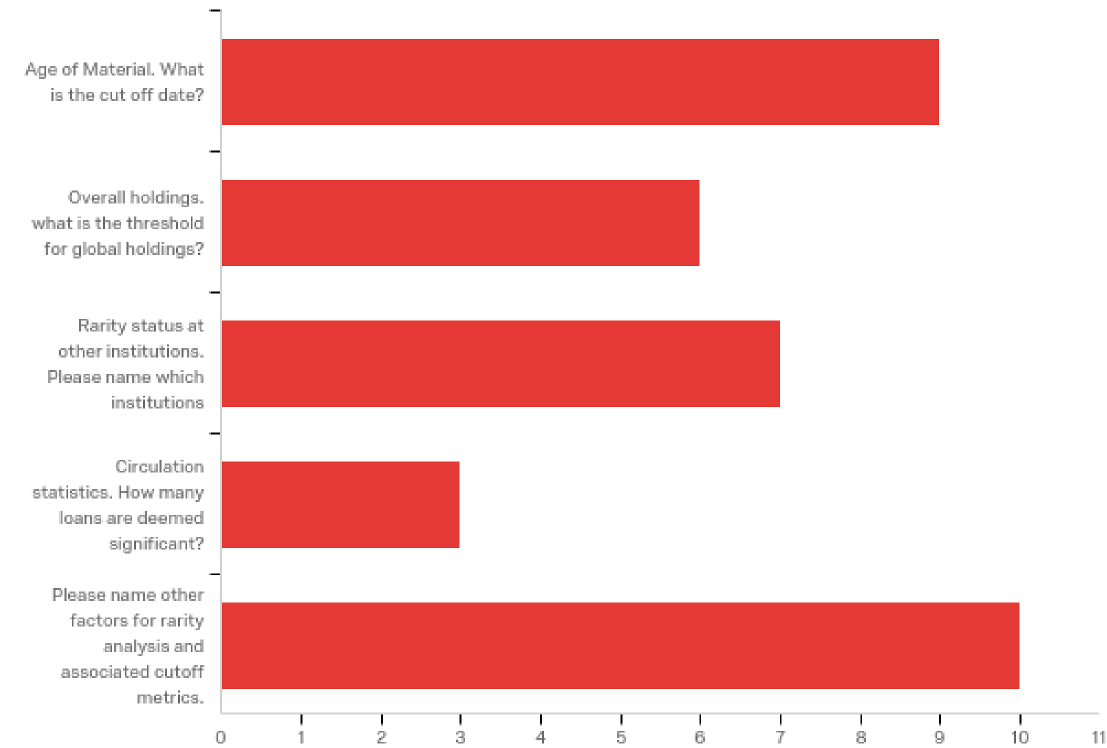

Table 1: Specific Criteria for Rarity Assessment			
Q4.1 Age	Q4.2 Holdings	Q4.3 Rarity Status	Q4.4 Circulation
1830	5	Duke	Sometimes
1850 (2)	10	Emory	No specific Number
1876	30	Harvard (3)	Avoid items with heavy use
1900 (2)	100	University of California	
1923	Worldcat	University of Texas	
		Yale (3)	
		Regional (2)	
		U.S.A.	

While other samples could provide more answers of a specific context, results of this survey indicate a degree of consistency in criteria for the broad range of law libraries. Without a doubt, the criterion most used is age. This is unsurprising, as rarity of any item increases with age. Items of the 19th century or older are most commonly considered of importance among survey takers. Although over half of the respondents consider size of holdings in rarity assessment, there is greater variance in holdings. There is more commonality with inter-institutional status. While 75% looked to other institutions, half specifically mentioned Harvard or Yale, who were also solicited in the study and are believed to have answered. Whether due to question error or difference of opinion, there is no conclusive evidence about its importance. While high circulation means degradation of book quality, the answers suggest opposing viewpoints on the effect of circulation. To quote one answer: “we try to avoid removing an item from general circulation if it is our only copy and is heavily used by patrons. We don’t want to restrict access.”

Q4.5 Other Metrics
Statehood and state history (3)
Artistic qualities (2)
Relation to law school faculty
Condition (4)
Older foreign and international materials
Marginalia (2)
Existing collection areas (4)

Question 4.5 provided respondents with the opportunity to write in other criteria which are considered in their institutions. Question 4.5 had 10 survey responses, presumably submitted from the respondent who chose not to answer Question 1. While the results expressed a number of other criteria, four responses indicated increased importance to items in existing collecting areas. Four others mentioned items of good condition given age, along with two mentioning artistic qualities and two mentioning marginalia. While also falling under collecting areas. Three mentioned items that dated to early statehood or held importance to a state’s legal history. Finally, one mentioned books authored by the institutions law faculty.

Part Two:

Part Two asked questions regarding procedures surrounding rarity assessment. Question 5 asked participants to name platforms, software, or applications used to conduct rarity testing. Of seven answers, four use OCLC WorldCat. Six mention OCLC or World Cat directly. One mentions Qualtrics, which the researcher connects to a Qualtrics workflow attached in a Q3 answer, which uses World Cat to derive holdings. Question 6 asked participants to explain how they select candidates for rarity assessment. Four indicated age as a primary factor as seen in Q4.1. Furthermore, however two of the four answers indicated desire to change current policy.

Table 2: Staff Allocation and Hours		
Q7 Hrs/Wk Individual	Q9 Hrs/Week Staff	Q8 Number of Staff
0.5	0	0
1	.25 to .5	1 (2)
1	0.67	1 to 2
0 to 2	1 (2)	2 (3)
2	2	2 to 3
4	0 to 2	
Irregular (2)	8	

Question 7 asked participants how many hours a week they allocate to rarity assessment. Two indicated no set time, three less than 1 hour, two were 2 hours or less, and 4 hours was the largest answer. Question 8 asked how many staff members assist in rarity assessment. As indicated by the Table Two, in the respondent libraries, no more than three staff member work on assessment with two being the median number of staff responsible for rarity assessment. Much like Question 7, Question 9 asked how many hours a week all staff put into rarity assessment. Five respondents indicated less 1 hour, three indicated less than two hours, and one listed 8 hours.

Table 3: Job Title
Q10 Title
Director of the Law Library
Reference and Faculty Research Services Librarian
Associate Director for Collection Management
Head of Collection Services
Head of Technical Services & Special Collections
Head of Special Collections
Special Collections Librarian & College Archivist
Special Collections Librarian (3)
Digital Content and Special Collections Librarian
Rare Book Librarian
Intern

Part Three:

Part Three questions were about professional level and education. Question 10 asked participants to list their current title. With the exception of one intern, all of the respondents were in full time staff positions; five were department heads, including one Director of the Law Library. While the majority of respondents work in collection services, the researcher credits this to the sample population as well as their usual job descriptions.

Table 4: Education
Q11 Level of Coursework
High Level (2)
Two courses (1)
Workshops/Conferences (1)
None (8)

Question 11 asked participants about their level of coursework in rare assessment. Of the 12 answers, 8 had no formal education involving rare books. One had experience only through workshops and conferences. Three had formal rare book coursework at library schools. While this does not directly indicate the education level of all staff people conducting assessment, considering the survey requested individuals most directly involved in assessment, assisting staff would be less influential in assistance. However, this is inconclusive, considering some participants may have had formal training but may work at libraries that do not undertake rarity assessment.

V. Discussion, Limitations, and Opportunities for Further Research

Question 4.4 “When conducting rarity assessment, [considering c]irculation statistics. How many loans are deemed significant?” provided an interesting set of answers. While only receiving three responses, the question sparked interesting answers, and opportunity for further research. The underlying assumption of the researcher was that higher circulation loans would imply a greater need to move an item to a rare collection. This assumes higher circulation is indicated higher value, as well as greater risk for damage. However, the only informative answer suggested high circulation would be grounds for rejecting transfer to rare collections, saying “[w]e try to avoid removing an item from general circulation if it is our only copy and is heavily used by patrons. We don’t want to restrict access.” Question 4.4 was the lowest cited factor of the four proposed, and even appeared lower than a few suggested by respondents. Two of the three survey respondents provided ambiguous answers, saying “sometimes” and “no specific number, just extra information”.

Question 4.5 provided an opportunity for respondents to contribute other criteria. Nine respondents included extra categories. Based on their answers, additional questions about specific collection development would provide additional information. Question 4.5 points taps into an underlying issue with rarity assessment: the value of an object is nebulous. The value of an item is determined by the combination of the aforementioned criteria, so the values are contingent on each other. But the results indicated a few fields that could be included in any follow up research: collection subjects, artistic qualities, and condition. The answers suggest that many rare book assessors have a sense of the subjects of interest in their collection. While it may be too granular to ask a question on collection areas and statehood, including a question on subject areas could yield interesting results. This would also greatly expand the scope of this survey; due to the significant collection development information it could yield. Another as

VI. Conclusion

While not an exhaustive audit, this survey revealed several things about its subject. Considering the survey as three parts, takeaways are presented regarding criteria, procedure, and qualification for rarity assessment in the context of law libraries. First, it is hard to define strictly, but rarity assessment is not conducted in half of the libraries surveyed in this study. The job titles of survey responders, as well as precautions in the cover letter, remove suspicion of a poor sample. The individuals who responded were often mid or high-level management or explicitly librarians. Second, while there are debates as to their related value, there are a few common criteria. The most prevalent factor from respondents for defining rarity was age of the book, 75% of which were in the 19^{th} Century. The second highest occurring factor was rarity status at other institutions. over half the participants identified Harvard and Yale as authorities. Overall holdings, commonly determined by OCLC World Cat, left no conclusive number, but were considered by most participants who undertake rarity.

Respondents also provided rich data around their work schedules and the priority of rarity assessment in their library. While rarity assessment was conducted by a median of 2 employees, the median total number of weekly hours allocated to rarity assessment is 1 hour. Although most of the 13 participants who listed their job titles of relevant specificity (as in the case of Rare Book Librarian) or leadership (such as Head of Special Collections), only three reported taking formal coursework related to rarity assessment, with an additional citing workshops and conference programs.

Overall, this survey established a few patterns regarding rarity assessment in law libraries. Yes. First, rarity assessment is not a ubiquitous responsibility in law libraries. Second, age is the primary indicator of rarity, with a focus on books printed before 1900. Third, a number of respondents expressed their processes were in need of improvement. While additional questions could have better explained survey takers' opinions and limits of their current systems, comments indicated there was a desire to expand or revise their procedure.

Finally, the individuals responsible for rarity assessment have little formal training in the subject. While not a significant portion of workload, two employees are responsible at over half of surveyed libraries who conduct rarity assessment. This affirms an original suspicion, that there is no link between special collections management in law libraries and antiquarian book training.

VII. References

Admin. (2010, October 12). Best Law Libraries. Retrieved from http://www.nationaljurist.com/content/best-law-libraries

Annan, G. L. (1952 January). What Makes A Book Rare? Bulletin of the Medical Library Association 40(1): 72-73. Retrieved from https://www-ncbi-nlm-nih-gov.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/pmc/articles/PMC195246/?tool=pmcentrez&report=abstract

Bahde, Anne. Smedberg, Heather; "Measuring the Magic: Assessment in the Special Collections and Archives Classroom", 13.2, 2012. https://rbm-acrl-org.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/index.php/rbm/article/view/380

Bowden, Ann. "Training for Rare Book Librarianship." *Journal of Education for Librarianship* 12, no. 4 (1972): 223-31. doi:10.2307/40322190.

Gnudi, M. T. (1964). The rare book and history of medicine section in a university medical library. Bulletin of the Medical Library Association, 52(3), 524. Retrieved from https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC198170/pdf/mlab00184-0040.pdf

Greenberg, J. (1996). Subject control of ephemera: MARC format options. Popular Culture in Libraries, 4(1), 71-91. Retrieved from http://libproxy.lib.unc.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/57423786?accountid=14244

Korotkova, U. (2016). Rare books as historical objects: A case study of the Elmer E. Rasmuson library rare books collection (Order No. 10104531). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1789912597). Retrieved from http://libproxy.lib.unc.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/1789912597?accountid=14244

Latham, K. F., "Medium rare: Exploring archives and their conversion from original to digital part two- the holistic knowledge arsenal of paper-based archives" LIBRES: Library and Information Science Research Electronic Journal, 21(1), 1-21, 2011. http://libproxy.lib.unc.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/860228872?accountid=14244

Potter, S., & Holley, R. P. (2010). Rare material in academic libraries. Collection Building, 29(4), 148-153. Retrieved from http://libproxy.lib.unc.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/839636195?accountid=14244

Sheehan, J. K. (2006). Intangible qualities of rare books: Toward a decision -making framework for preservation management in rare book collections, based upon the concept of the book as object (Order No. 3214497). Available from ProQuest Dissertations &

Theses Global. (305295593). Retrieved from http://libproxy.lib.unc.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/305295593?accountid=14244

Westney, L. C. “Intrinsic value and the permanent record: The preservation conundrum”, OCLC Systems & Services, 23(1), 5-12, 2007. doi:http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/10.1108/10650750710720702

"Guidelines on the Selection and Transfer of Materials from General Collections to Special Collections", American Library Association, April 19, 2007. http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/selctransfer

“Selections: Defining and Managing Special Collections”, Arizona State Library Archives & Public Records, https://azlibrary.gov/libdev/continuing-education/cdt/selection-special-collections

Appendix

Appendix A: Rare Book Assessment Survey:

Rare Book Assessment 2018 Edward Stocking

P1 The purpose of this research study is to see if there are common practices in law libraries regarding rarity assessment. You are being asked to take part in a research study because of your role in collections in a law library. Please answer all of the questions as thoroughly as possible. Out of respect for your anonymity, no personal information will be collected.
This study (IRB#19-0135) has been reviewed and exempted by the UNC Non-Biomedical Institutional Review Board on March 20, 2019.

Q1 Is rarity assessment conducted at your law library?

- ○ Yes (4)
- ○ No (5)

Q2 If possible, please attach forms, etc. your institution uses when conducting rarity assessment:

Q3 If above materials are web-based, please enter their URL's below

____

Q4 When conducting rarity assessment, which of the following factors are considered:

☐ Age of Material. What is the cut off date? (1) ____

☐ Overall holdings. what is the threshold for global holdings? (2) ____

☐ Rarity status at other institutions. Please name which institutions (3) ____

☐ Circulation statistics. How many loans are deemed significant? (4) ____

☐ Please name other factors for rarity analysis and associated cutoff metrics. (5) ____

P2 Please answer the following procedural questions

Q5 What platform, software, or application (if any) do you use to conduct rarity testing?

____

Q6 How do you identify which items in the collection will undergo rarity assessment?

____

Q7 How many hours a week do you allocate to rarity assessment?

____

Q8 How many staff members assist in rarity assessment?

____

Q9 Combined, how many hours a week do staff at your institution put into rarity assessment?

____

P3 Please answer the following professional questions

Q10 Please enter your current title:

____

Q11 Have you taken coursework regarding rare books assessment? If so, discuss below:

____

End of Block: Default Question Block